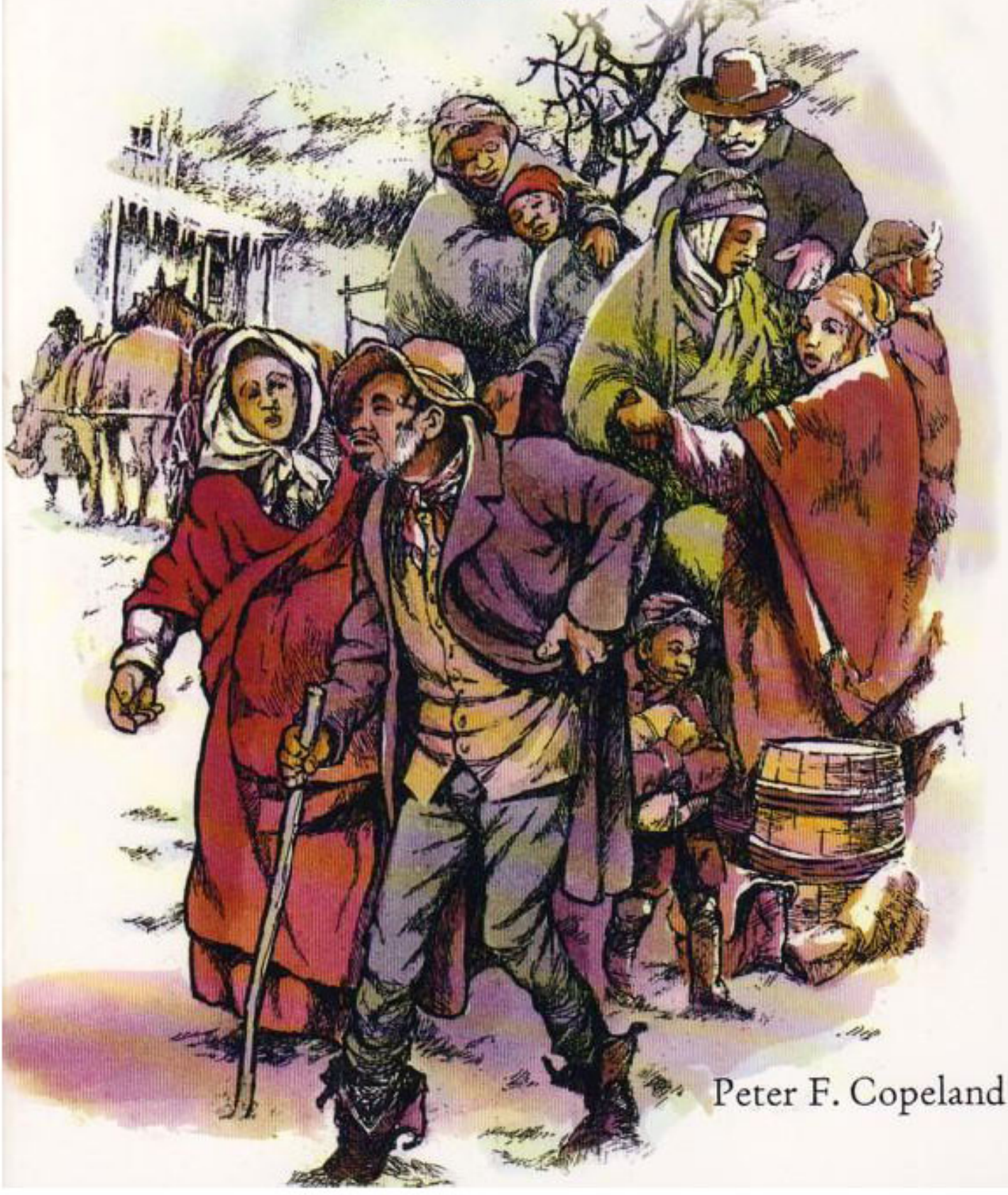
VISIT…

Dover Coloring Book

THE STORY OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD



Peter F. Copeland

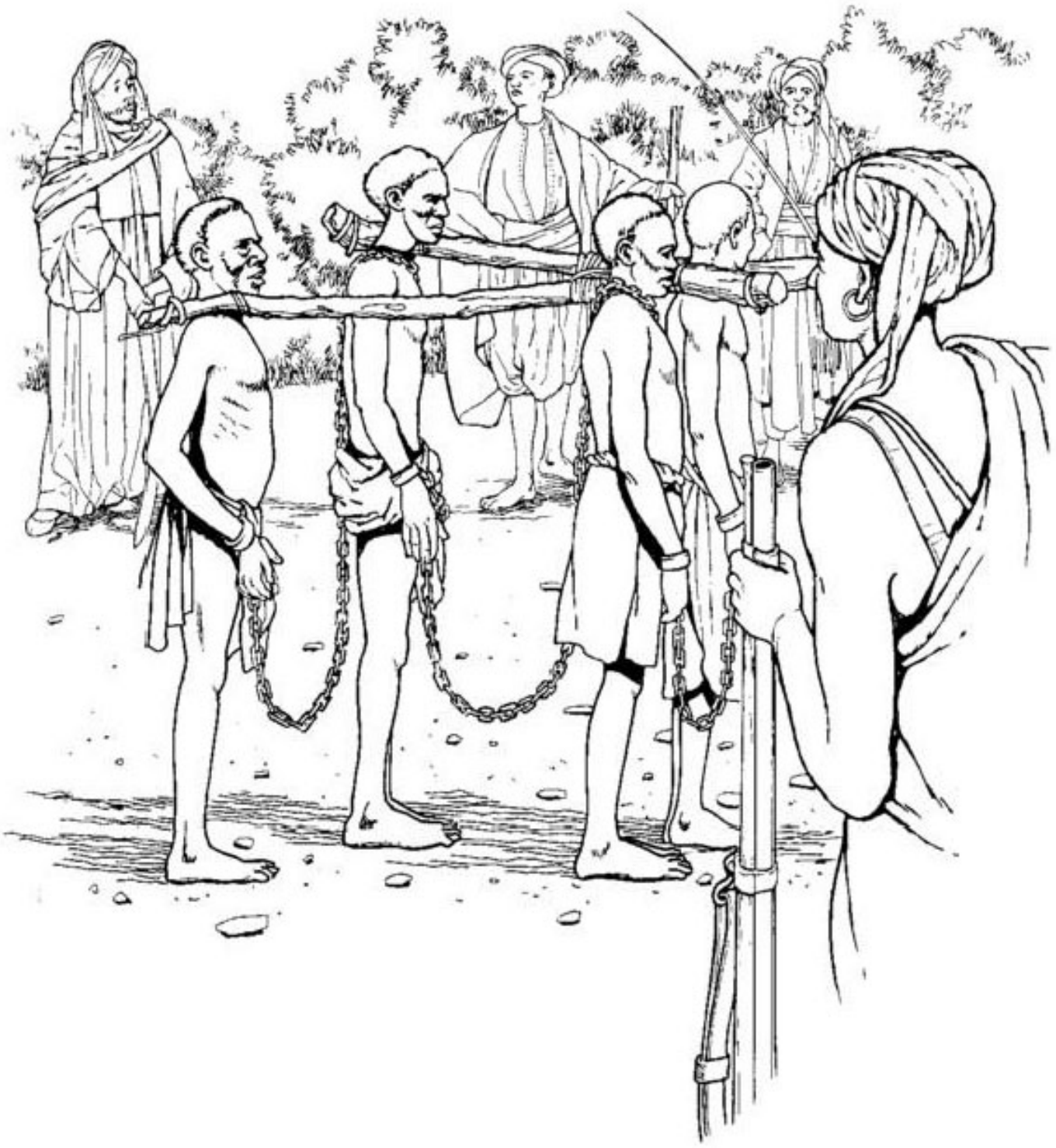
Introduction

The Underground Railroad, a means of assisting slaves to escape from the southern states, takes its place in American history alongside the abolitionist movement. Among the early abolitionists—those who opposed slavery on principle and sought its end—were the Quakers. Also known as the Society of Friends, Quakers believed that the Bible teaches that all human beings are equal. Some of the leading abolitionists, such as Laura Haviland, Thomas Garrett, and Levi and Catharine Coffin, were Quakers. Some of the most tireless and effective crusaders for abolition were African-American men and women, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman. The abolitionist movement grew as greater numbers of people dedicated themselves to fighting for the total elimination of slavery from the United States.

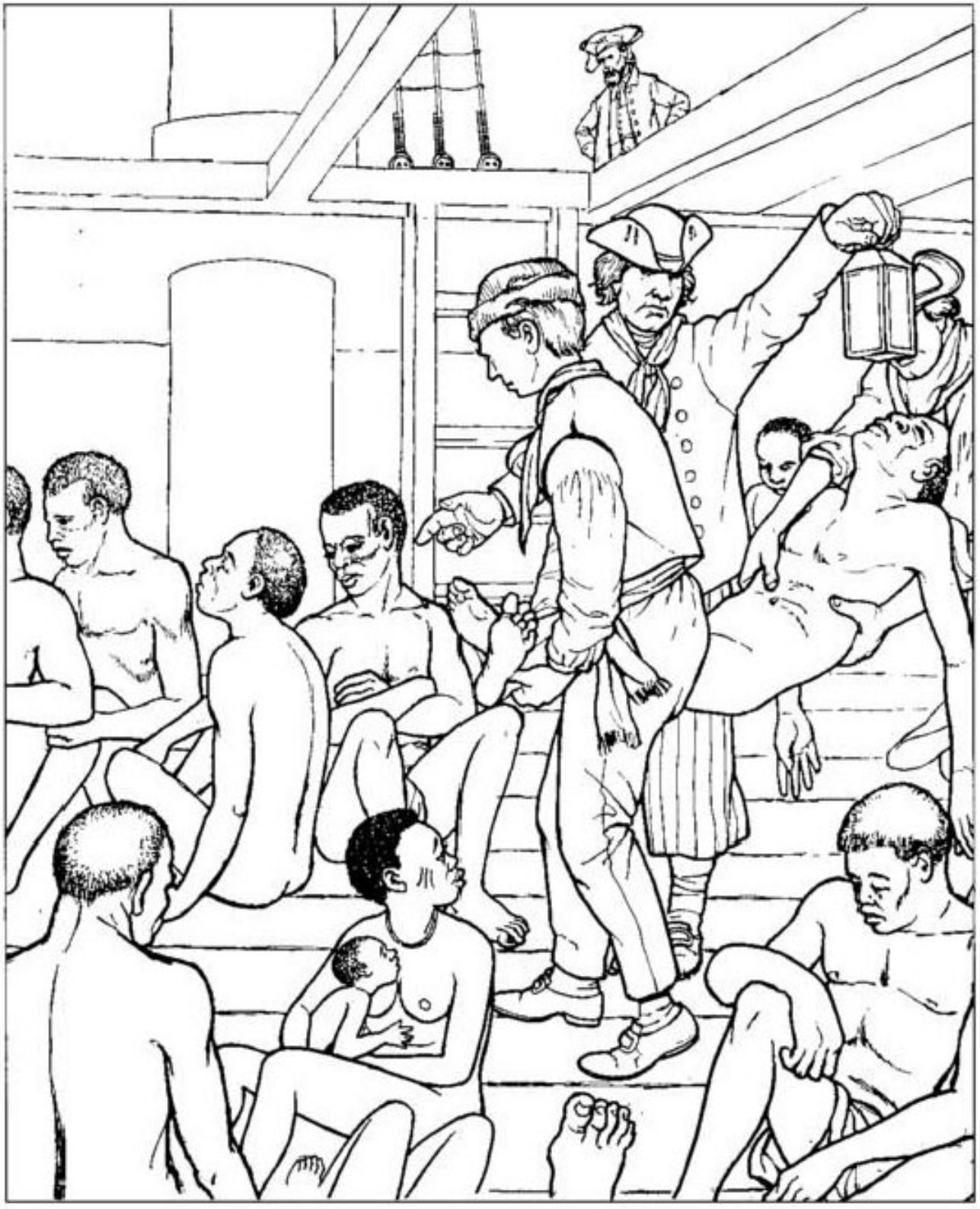
The Underground Railroad was not an actual railroad at all. So named around 1831, the Railroad was a secret, ever-changing network of hiding places, safe houses, and escape routes for helping slaves get to northern states and, eventually, Canada (to the regions now known as Ontario, Québec, and the Maritime Provinces). Members of the Railroad used code words such as "passenger" for a fugitive slave; "station" for a safe house or rest stop; "station master" for the keeper of the safe house; and "conductors" for people who guided slaves on their way, giving directions and leading them. "Load of potatoes" or "parcel" referred to the fugitives themselves, who were often smuggled disguised as goods. "Following the North Star" meant navigating with the North Star; the popular folk song "Follow the Drinking Gourd" referred to using the Big Dipper constellation, which pointed to the North Star, as a guide.

During the years of the American Revolution, the British recruited thousands of blacks, the majority of whom were runaway slaves, and succeeded in gaining freedom for many at the war's end by removing them to Canada. Although the newly independent United States remained a slave-owning nation, the move for abolition grew steadily stronger in the northern states. One by one these states outlawed slavery, and in 1807 the U.S. government declared it illegal to bring in slaves from outside the country (slave trading was still legal in the slave-owning states). The South, however, resisted abolition, for the southern economy depended on the work of slaves, especially after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793 made cotton production far easier and more profitable for plantation owners.

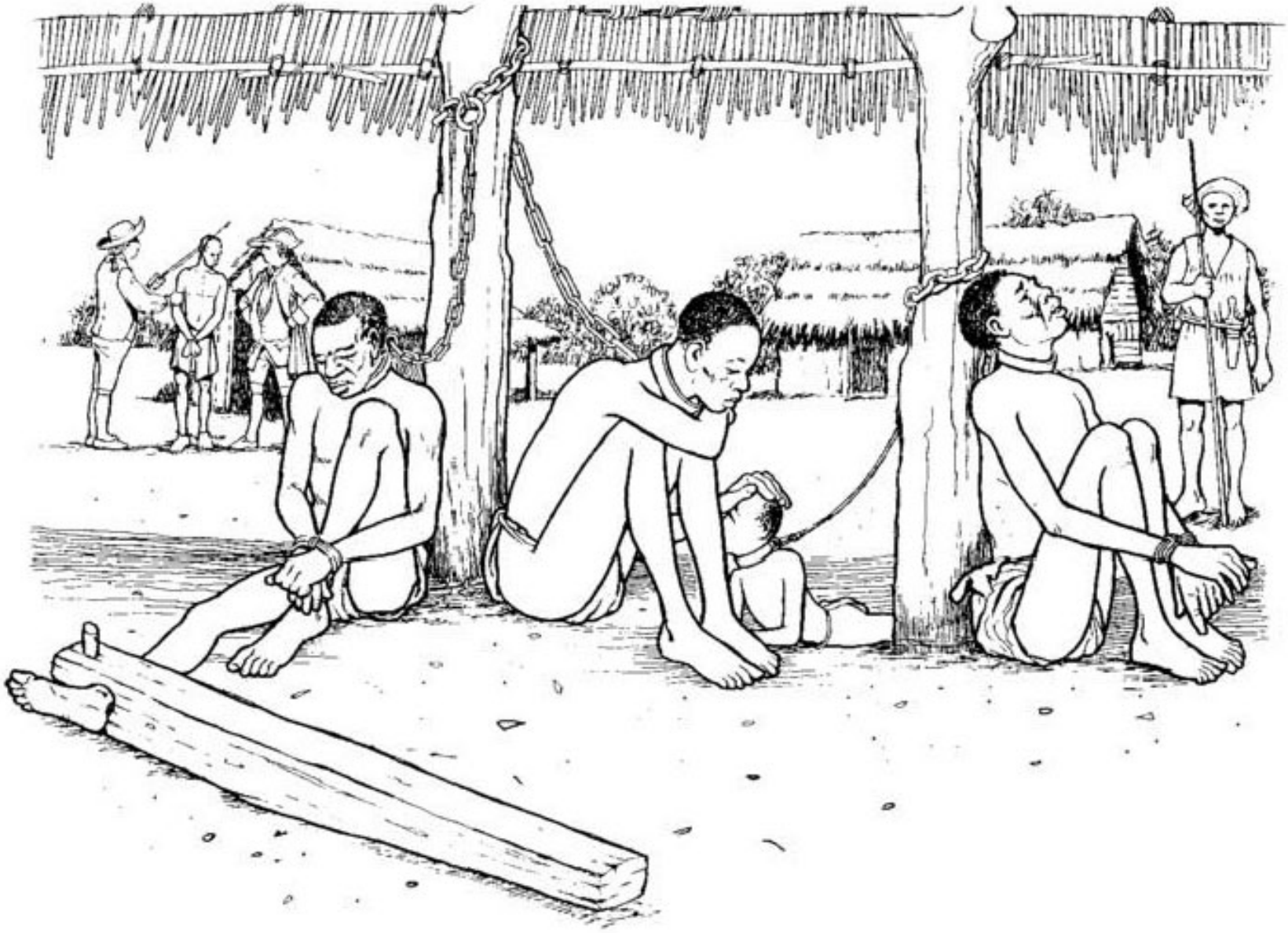
It took courage to work on the Underground Railroad, for aiding refugees was extremely dangerous, as well as illegal. The first Fugitive Slave Act (1793) made helping a runaway or preventing his or her arrest a criminal offense. The second Fugitive Slave Act (part of the 1850 Compromise) put in place heavy fines and jail sentences for those assisting in escapes. Over 3000 abolitionist sympathizers in the North, the South, and Canada helped escaping slaves between 1804 and 1860 (after 1826, Canada refused to return runaways to the U.S., thereby becoming a haven). It has been estimated that over 50,000 slaves escaped to freedom via the Underground Railroad between 1830 and 1860.



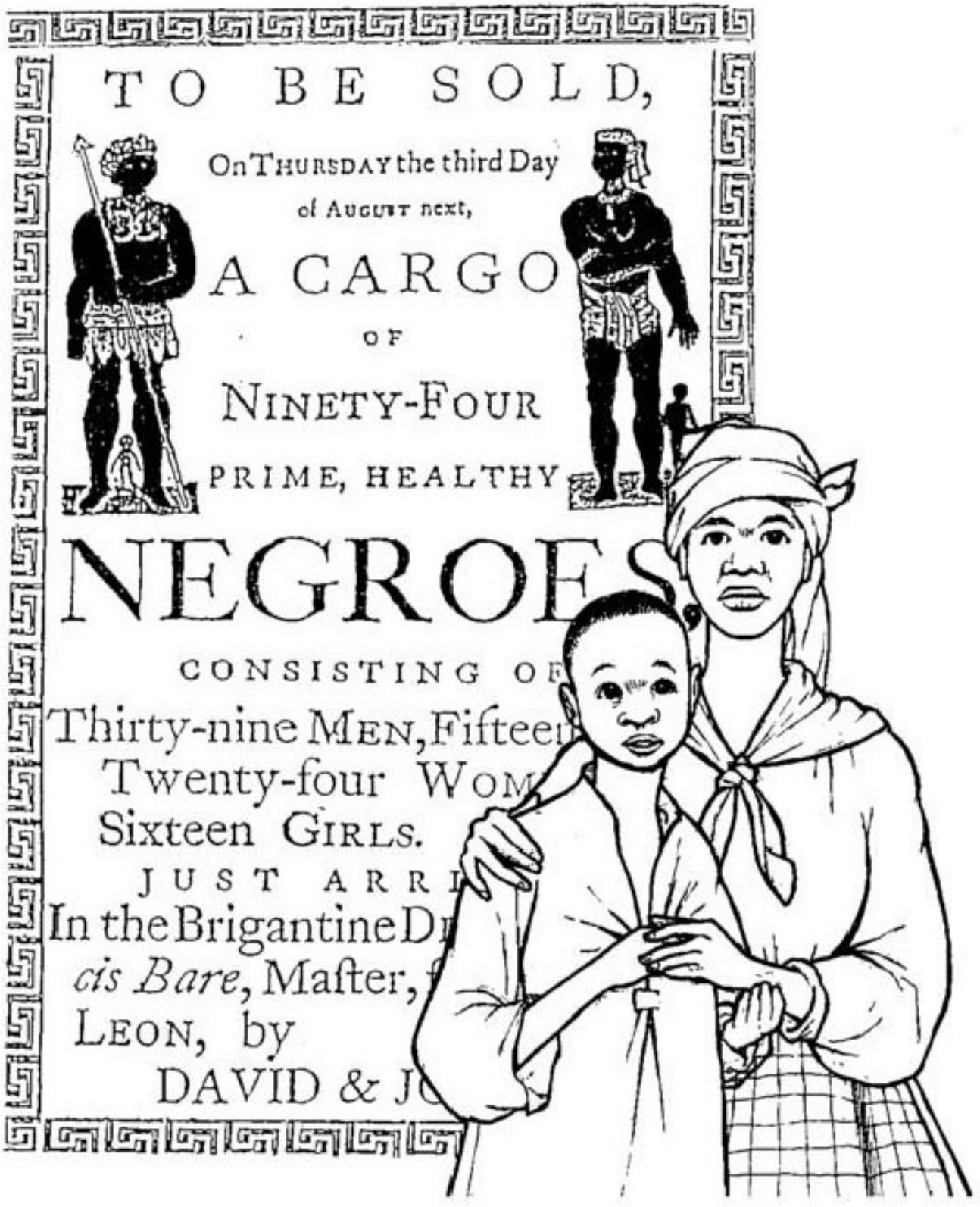
Slave dealers in Africa. The African slave trade was engaged in by the Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, French, North African Arabs, and Americans. Some African chieftains participated as well. The trade went on for centuries along the coast of West Africa, from Senegal to the Equator (the "Slave Coast"). Prisoners of war and villagers captured in slave raids were bound together in gangs and marched to coastal forts, where they were kept captive by the local ruler. Eventually they were sold to slave brokers, branded with hot irons like cattle, and loaded aboard slave ships—floating prisons where men, women, and children were packed into every inch of space "below decks" for their voyage to the New World.



Below decks aboard a slave ship. Slaves were delivered aboard ship chained together, and they mostly remained so during the voyage. They were released each day to get some exercise and fresh air (to avoid asphyxiation), to be fed, and to perform the task of removing the bodies of those who had died in the night, after which they were chained up together again.



A slave pen. When the slave ship arrived at an American port (in the West Indies or on the mainland in the Americas), the slaves were given a health checkup and taken to a slave pen to be washed and fattened up while awaiting sale at auction.

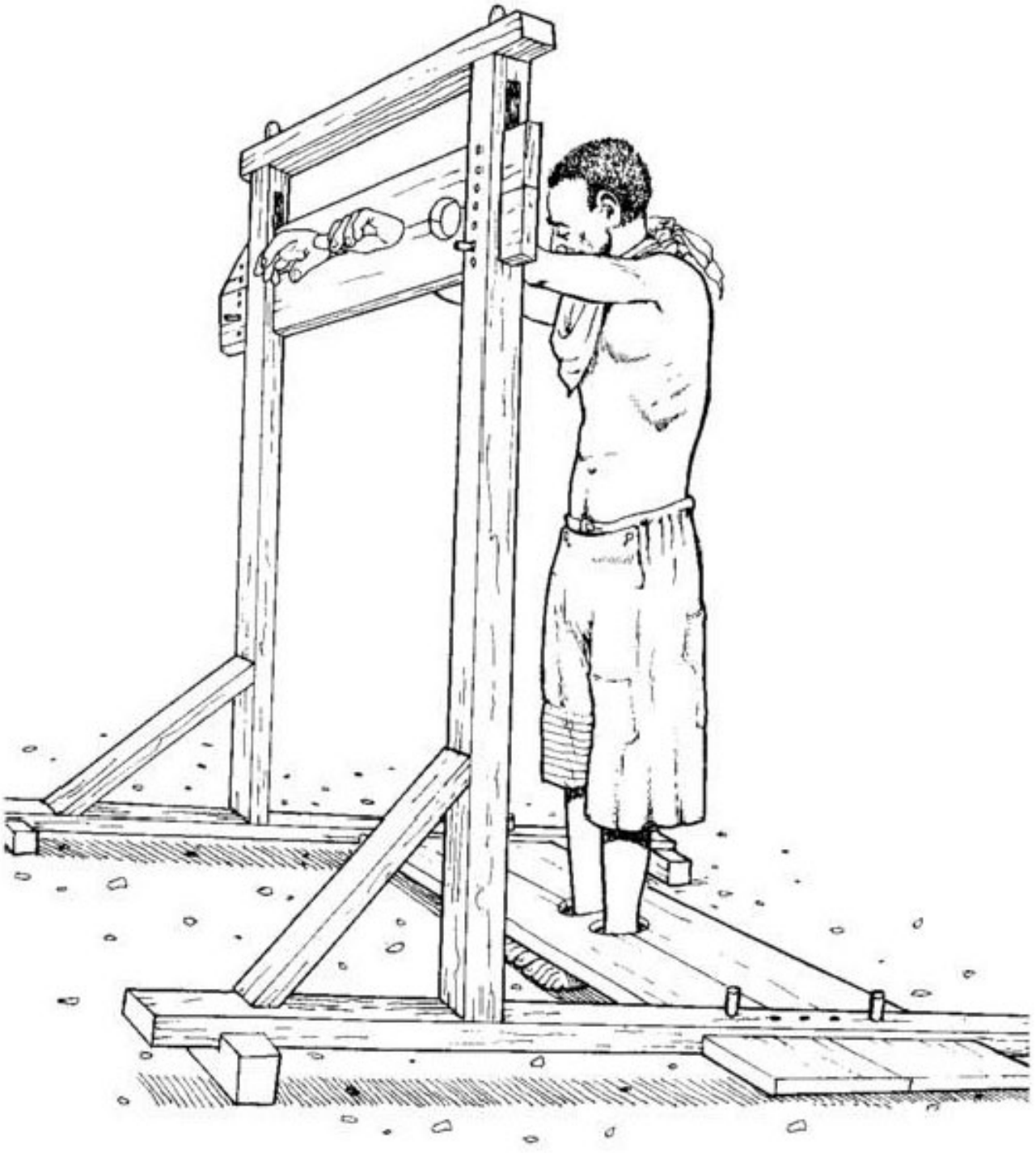


A slave sale in Charleston. Posters and newspaper advertisements like the one seen here announced and publicized each slave sale. Slaves were described as male or female, adult or child, and their experience and abilities noted; clients were allowed to inspect them before the actual sale. Many families were broken up at the sale, parents and children sold separately, never to see each other again. Here we see a woman and her child, members of a group about to be sold in Charleston in 1817.

Slave laborers in the cotton fields of Alabama. The majority of captive men, and many of the women, became plantation slaves employed in the cultivation of sugarcane, indigo, rice, tobacco, and other colonial products in earlier days. After the invention of the cotton gin in 1793, slave laborers such as those seen here were chiefly employed in the southern United States in the cotton fields.

Slave rebellions. Slave revolts occurred both in the New World and aboard the slave ships en route from Africa. Revolts were, in most cases, put down with savage cruelty. Here we see a celebrated uprising aboard the slave ship *Amistad* in 1839. Led by slave Joseph Cinque, the captives armed themselves with cane knives and defeated the ship's crew, killed the captain and the cook, and attempted to force the crew members to return them to Africa. The crew, however, steered the ship toward America, eventually landing just offshore of Long Island, New York, where the slaves were taken into custody. Abolitionists took up their legal defense, and in a case that went through the judicial system right up to the Supreme Court, the Africans were exonerated. Eventually, they returned to Africa.

Runaways. Slave uprisings occurred in Santo Domingo, Mexico, Brazil, South Carolina, Cuba, Columbia, and Jamaica, among other places, during the centuries of slavery in the Americas. Runaway slaves formed communities known as "Cimarron" or "Maroon" towns, often allying themselves with local native peoples. These rebellions so plagued Spanish authorities that, after 1600, peace treaties were made with the rebels, and their freedom granted. An armed band of rebel ex-slaves from South Carolina is shown headed for freedom in Spanish Florida.



Punishment for captured runaways. Here we see the punishment of a recaptured runaway slave, who has been placed in stocks and forced to stand for as many hours (or days) as his master or overseer decided upon. Other punishments were severe, even fatal, depending upon the fear or rage felt by the slave owner. Recaptured slaves were forced to wear various kinds of slave collars (one of which can be seen on page 29); others were forced to drag heavy ox chains attached to their legs or necks; some were burned with hot irons or had toes or fingers amputated.

Black soldiers of Lord Dunmore's Ethiopian Regiment. In 1775 Lord John Dunmore, Royal Governor of Virginia, fought against the rebellious colonists at Williamsburg. He published a broadside declaring that any and all rebel-owned slaves who were willing to bear arms in his Lordship's service would be set free, along with their families. From plantations all over Virginia and Maryland, small numbers of slaves, some with families, ran off to join the King's forces at Norfolk. The Ethiopian regiment was organized from these runaway slaves, joining the King's forces at Norfolk in late 1775. Part of the regiment fought at the battle of Great Bridge, where the British were defeated and forced to leave Virginia. The British fleet left Norfolk with the survivors of the Ethiopian regiment aboard; in the ensuing weeks, ship fever decimated their ranks. The regiment was broken up in New York City in 1776.

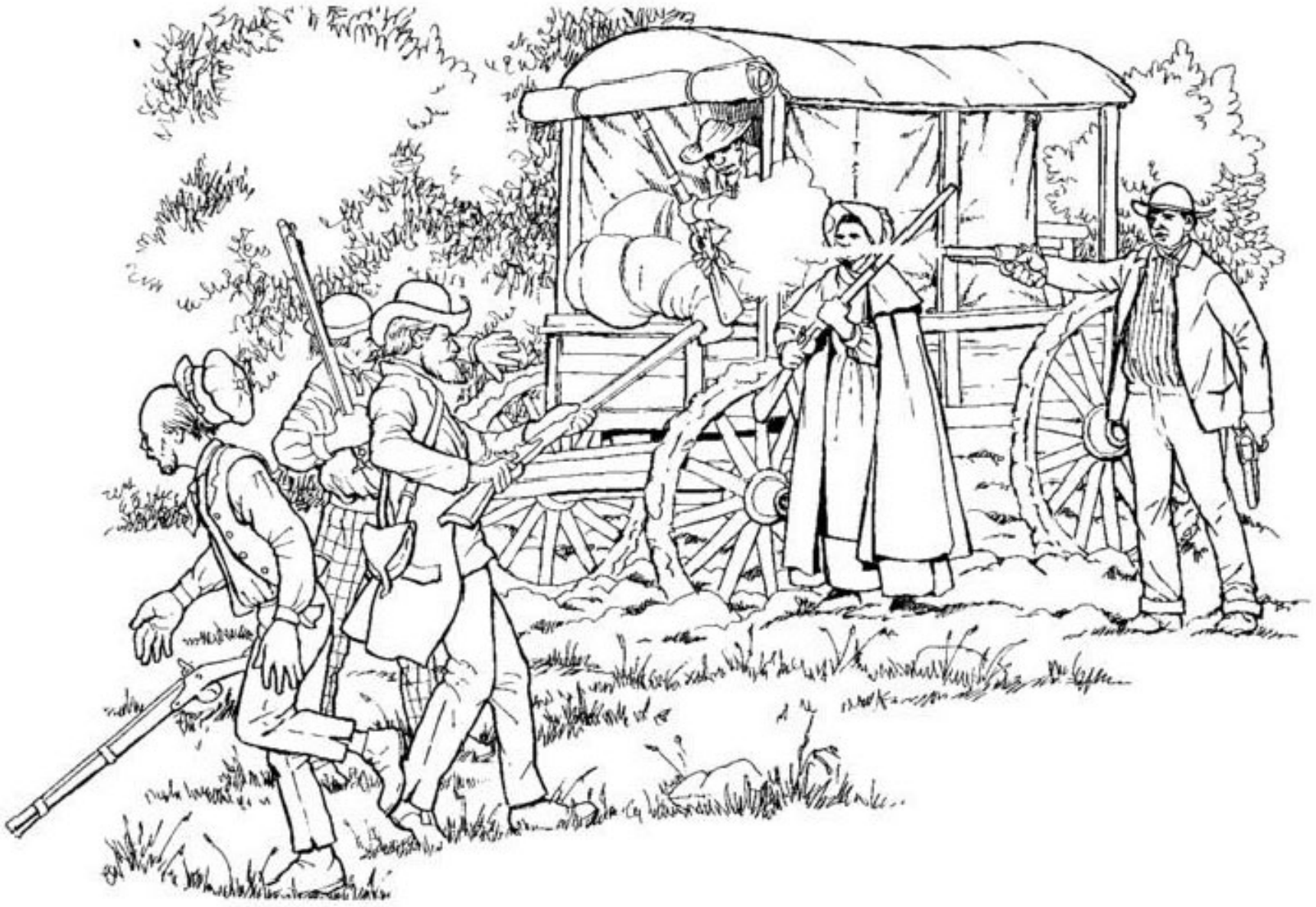
DIGBY, 18th JUNE 1792.
RUN AWAY, Joseph Odel and
Peter Lawrence (Negroes) from their
Masters, and left Digby last evening, the first
mentioned is about Twenty four years of Age,
five Feet six Inches high, had on a light
brown Coat, red Waistcoat and thick
Breeches, but took other Cloaths with him,
likely young Fellow with
white Teeth —
five
inches high, very Black
Whoever will secure and
them again, shall re-
all reasonable Charges
DANIEL ODEL.
PHILIP EARL.

Runaway slaves of 1792. Here we see two young runaway slaves, along with a runaway notice of the type published in newspapers and posted as broadsides in public places in the 18th and 19th centuries. The lives of runaway slaves were perilous in the southern states, where the law of the land was against them, and bands of patrollers and professional slave catchers made escape extremely difficult. The runaway slave always kept in mind the knowledge that capture would result in punishment such as flogging, if not worse.

Slave catchers in pursuit of runaways. Slave catchers usually tried to shoot runaway slaves using birdshot (small pellets) to knock them down without doing too much injury. Slaves were considered as valuable property to be returned intact, if possible, for punishment.

"On to Liberty!"—The route to freedom. After the War of 1812, Upper Canada's attorney general, John Beverley Robinson, declared that blacks residing in Canada were free, and that the Canadian courts would protect their freedom. Then word began to spread through the southern slave community, slowly and secretly, that a runaway slave, traveling at night, could follow the North Star to reach Canada. The secret network that sent slaves north became known as the Underground Railroad. There was no actual railroad—rather, there existed a network of hiding places, safe houses, and escape routes, all provided by those committed to sending slaves along a route to freedom. Because a runaway recaptured in any part of the United States, by law, had to be returned to his or her owner, for a slave to reach Canada meant freedom. It was, however, a long and perilous journey, almost impossible to undertake without friends and the assistance of the Underground Railroad network.

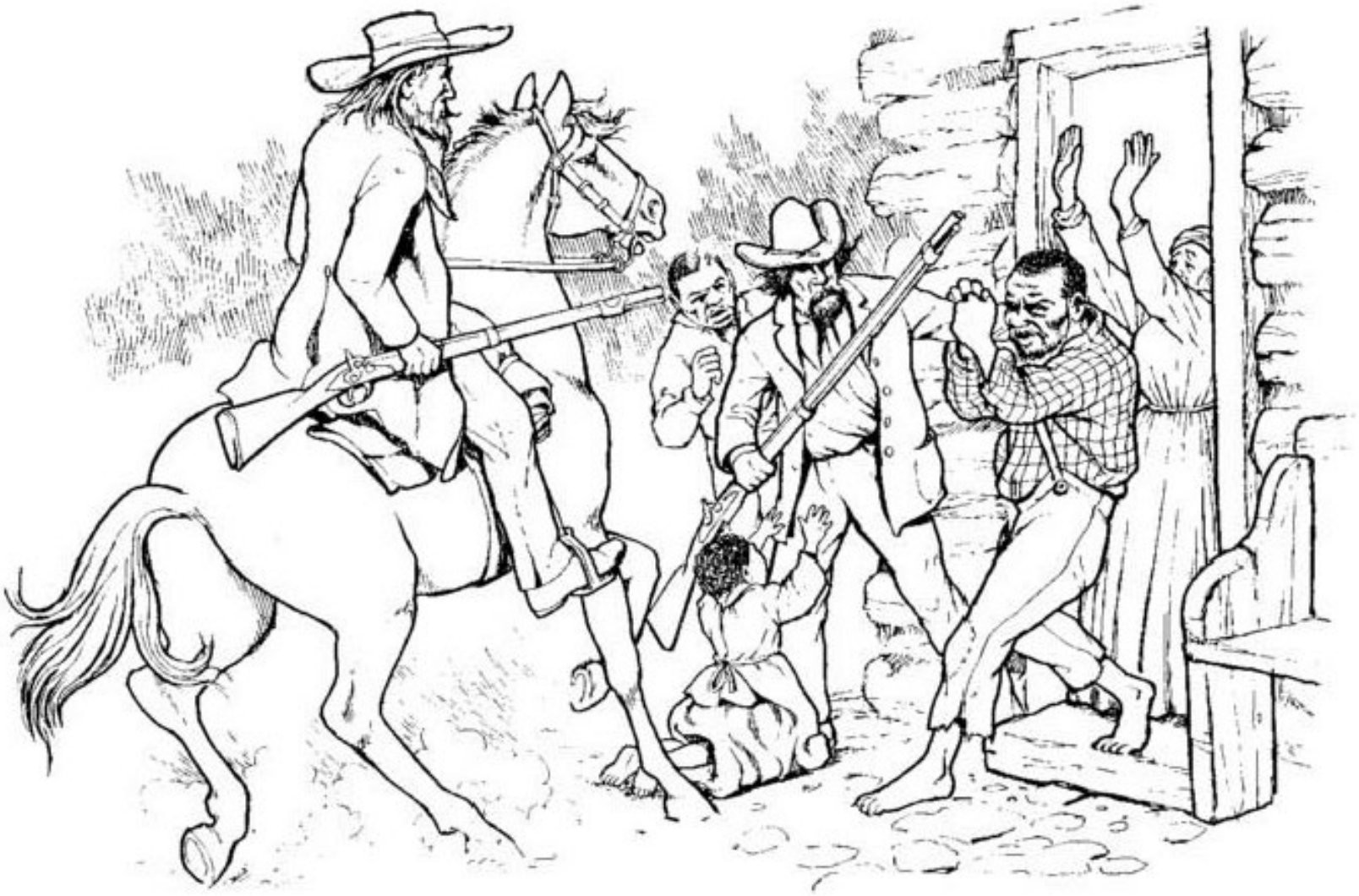
Harriet Beecher Stowe. No one piece of writing did as much to end slavery in the U.S. as the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, by Harriet Beecher Stowe, published in 1852. It first appeared as a serial in an anti-slavery paper, and then sold 300,000 copies in novel form within a year. It aroused a deep hostility in the slave-holding South but awoke a widespread public consciousness of the evils of slavery. Uncle Tom, the long-suffering head of a family of Kentucky slaves depicted in the novel, has since become a symbol of resignation, rather than resistance, to oppression.



Escaping slaves fighting off slave hunters. Here we see an event that the professional slave hunters did not often face: a family of escaped slaves equipping themselves with weapons, a wagon, and a draft animal to fight for their freedom. It was rare that an escaping slave could run off with a horse, much less a gun.

Hunted slaves attacked by dogs. Tracking dogs were used by slave hunters to pursue their quarry. Pictured here are two escapees trying to defend themselves against trained attack dogs. If a slave were killed by dogs, the owner might consider that despite the monetary loss, the incident would act as a caution to other slaves contemplating escape.

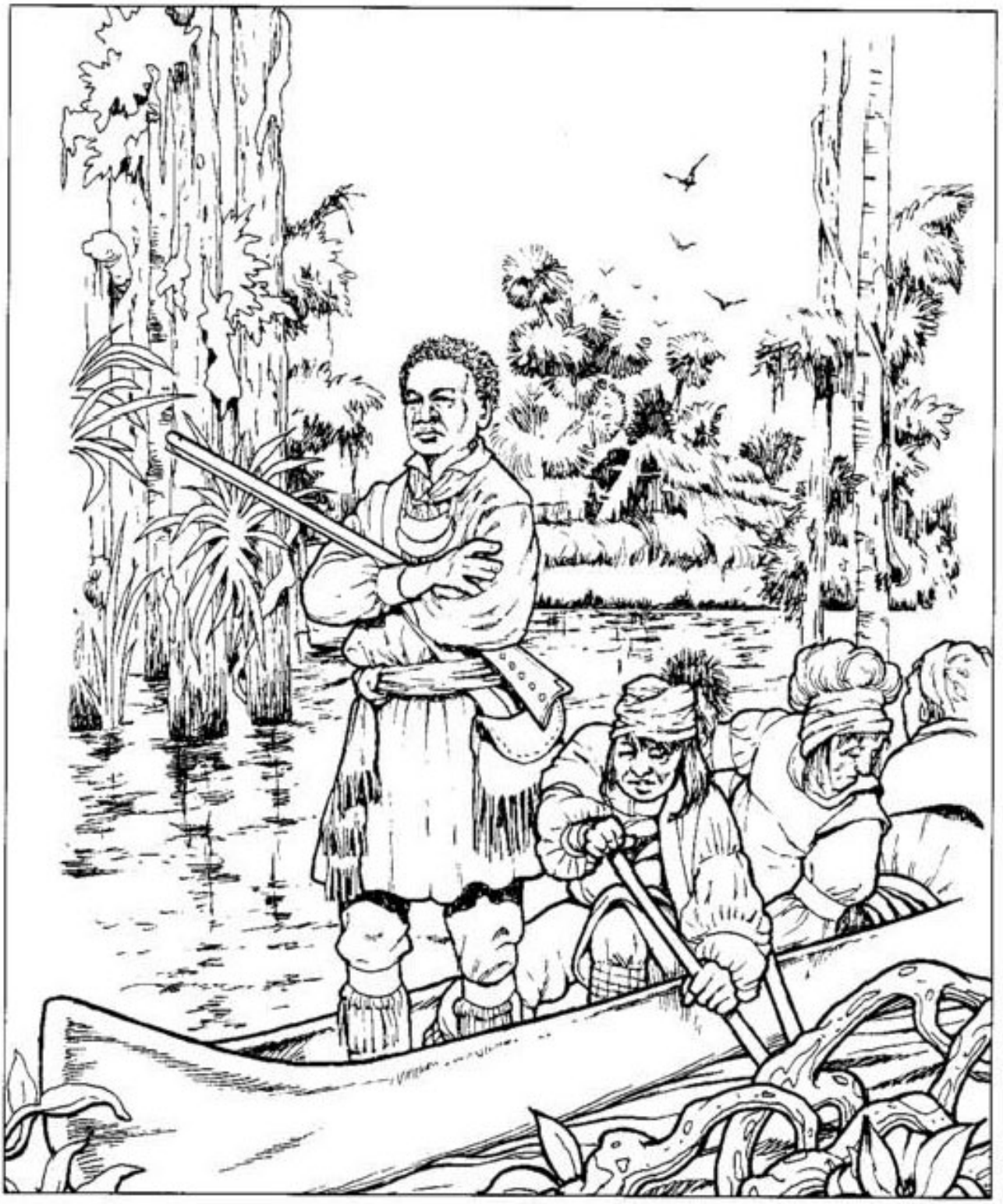
Frederick Douglass. As a slave, Frederick Douglass witnessed brutality firsthand. He escaped from servitude in Baltimore in 1838, traveling to New England, where he became a leader of the Massachusetts anti-slavery movement; he lectured for the American Anti-Slavery Society as well. Douglass wrote *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, a short autobiography, in 1845. He later established an abolitionist newspaper, *The North Star*, in Rochester, New York. Douglass left the U.S. after the failure of the John Brown raid at Harpers Ferry. He returned at the beginning of the Civil War to help raise black regiments for the Union war effort, as well as to agitate for Negro suffrage and civil rights. Frederick Douglass died in Washington, D.C., in 1895.



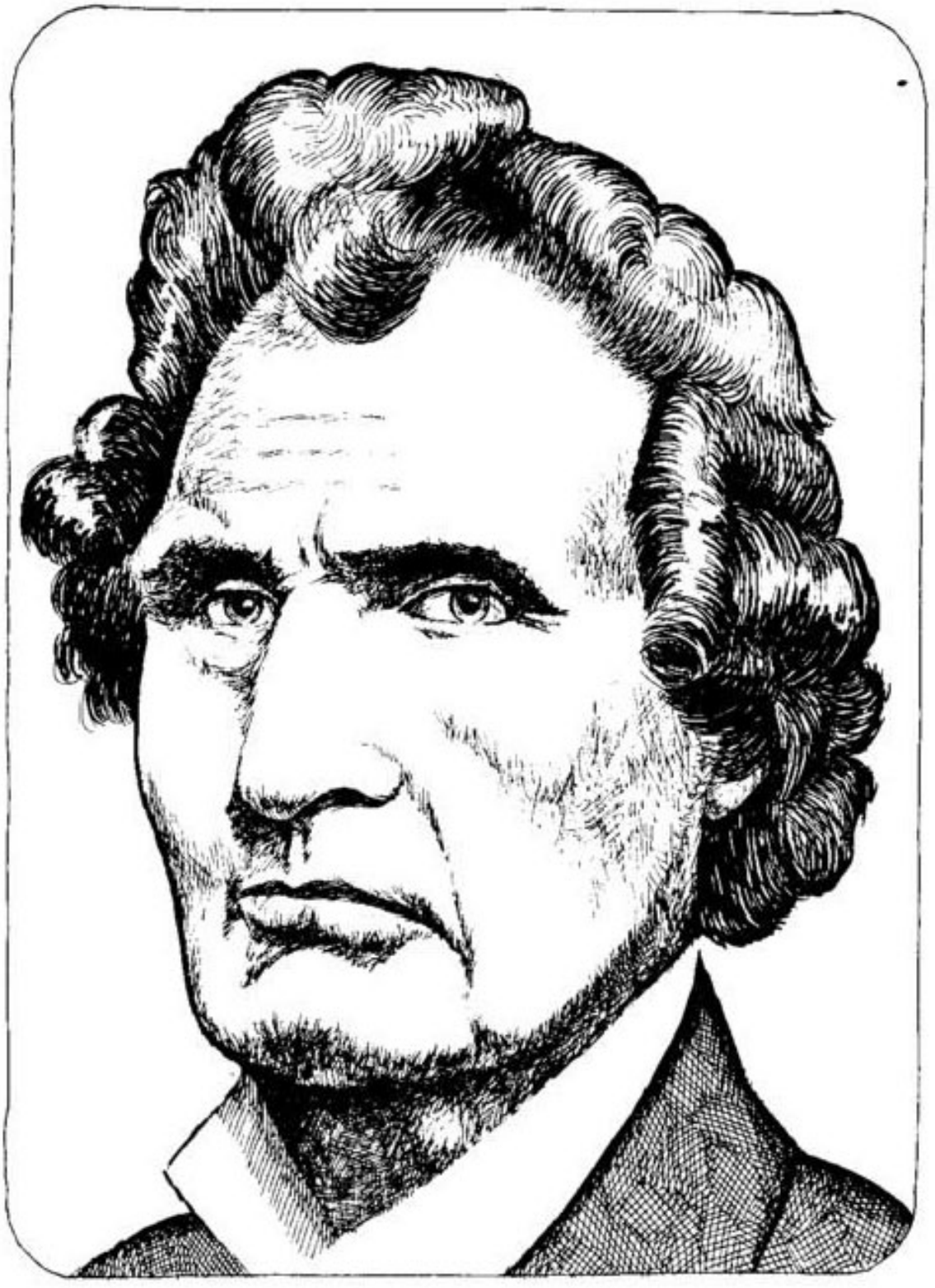
Slaves seized by patrollers, circa 1850. The patrol system was an important means of controlling slaves. Poor whites were employed to form nightly mounted patrols and seize any slave who was abroad at night without a written pass granting permission. Here, patrollers apprehend a slave who has slipped away to visit his wife and children on a neighboring farm—an offense for which he will, no doubt, be punished.

Alex Ross, the Canadian "bird watcher." This Canadian doctor made regular trips to the southern U.S. for "bird watching" vacations—code words for assisting runaway slaves. At night he would slip away to the slave quarters at plantations and pass out maps, instructions, and directions to Canada, as well as knives, compasses, and a little money to those planning to escape. During the Civil War, Dr. Ross was also instrumental in helping federal authorities discover and arrest the leader of a Confederate spy ring.

St. James African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Ithaca, New York. St. James AME Zion Church is the oldest church in Ithaca, New York. A station on the Underground Railroad, this church is located in a community that was an important transfer point for fugitive slaves bound for Canada. In the days of the Underground Railroad, the church was visited by Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.



Escaped slave with Seminole Indians. Native Americans were among the earliest friends of fugitive slaves. Runaways frequently found refuge with Native Americans, who themselves had been driven off their ancestral lands and hunted by white men and were accustomed to living in remote swamps and forests. Fugitive slaves often intermarried with Native Americans and settled in the tribal community. Here we see an escaped slave in native dress with members of a Seminole tribe making their way through a Florida mangrove swamp by dugout canoe.

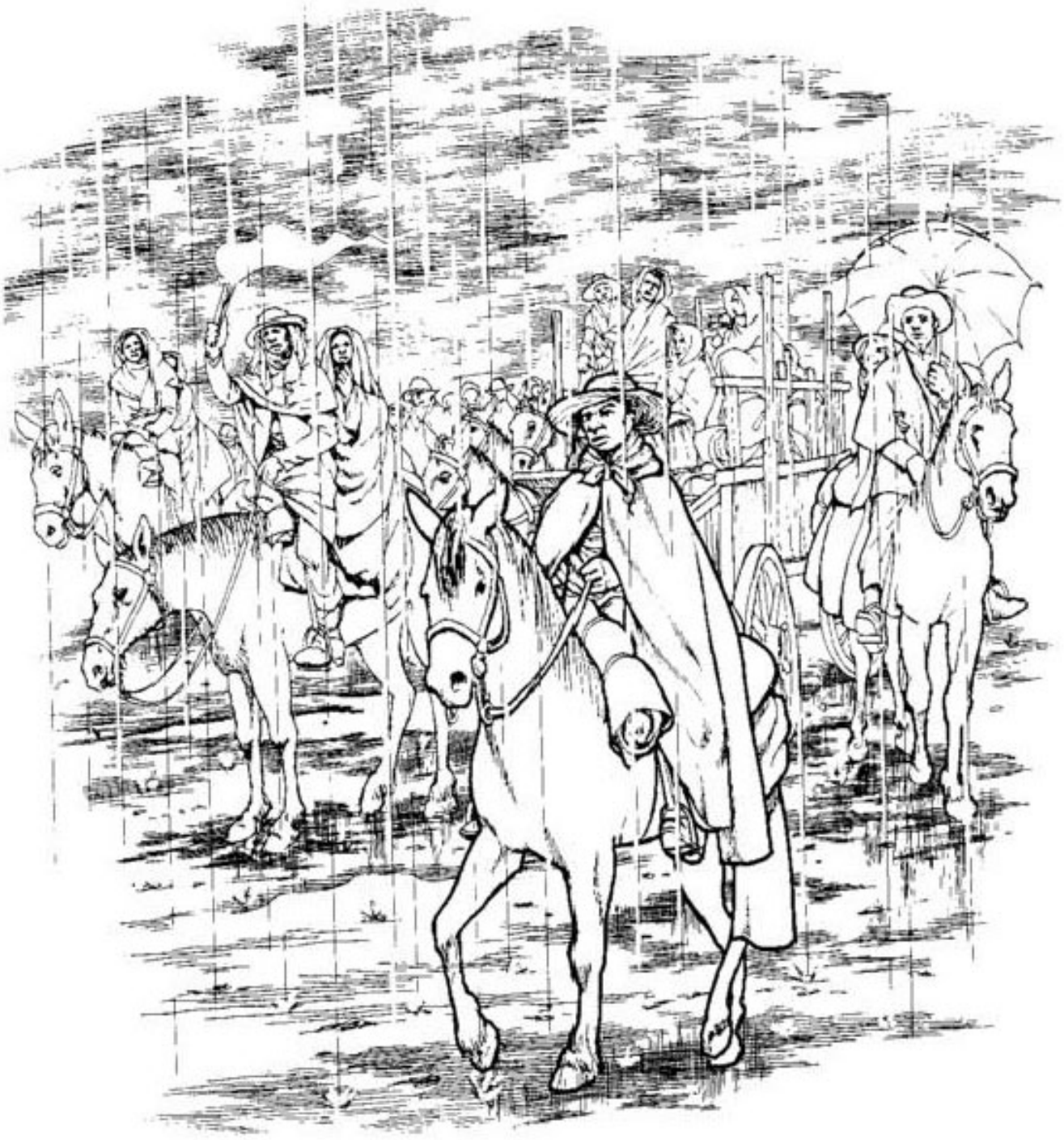


Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania. Thaddeus Stevens was a lawyer, politician and avid abolitionist who became a station keeper of the Underground Railroad. While a lawyer, he defended, without fee, many fugitive slaves, winning some of them their freedom. Elected to Congress from Pennsylvania in 1848, he was a brilliant and fiery spokesman for anti-slavery forces and an important legislative force for racial equality. Intense bitterness and vindictiveness against the South after the Civil War marred his later political career.

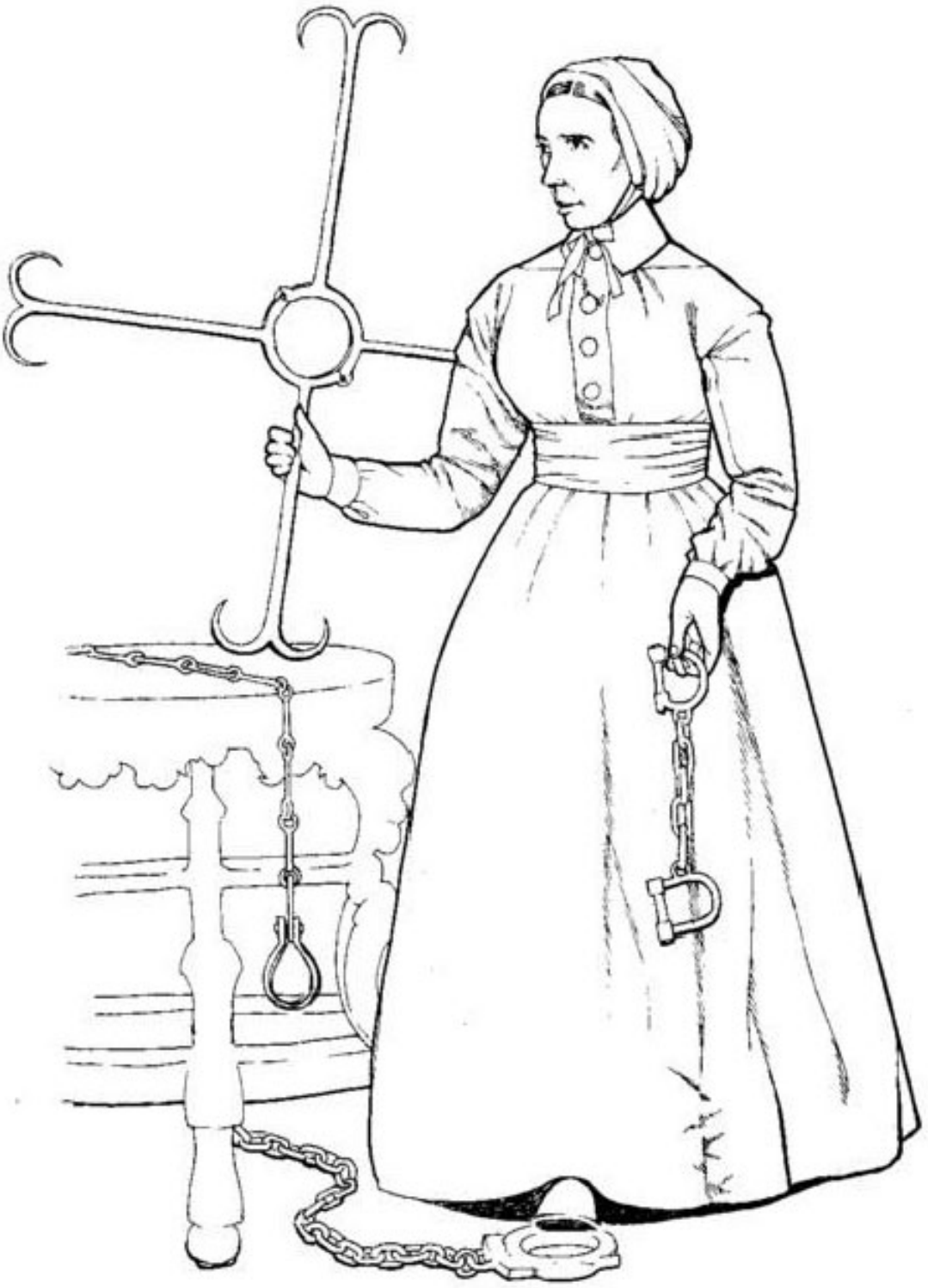
Slave catchers seizing a family. If, in their pursuit of a fugitive slave, the slave catchers were unable to catch their quarry, they would sometimes seize a free black person, whom they would accuse of being a runaway slave. They might also capture unguarded children and carry them to a southern state, where they would sell them into slavery for any price they could get.

Josiah Henson and his wife, escapees to Canada. The character of Uncle Tom in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was based, in part, on Josiah Henson, a slave who remained loyal to his master until learning of his plan to secretly sell Henson's wife and four children. Josiah Henson escaped with his family to Canada in 1830. In 1849 he wrote the story of his life, from which Stowe drew many details for her novel.

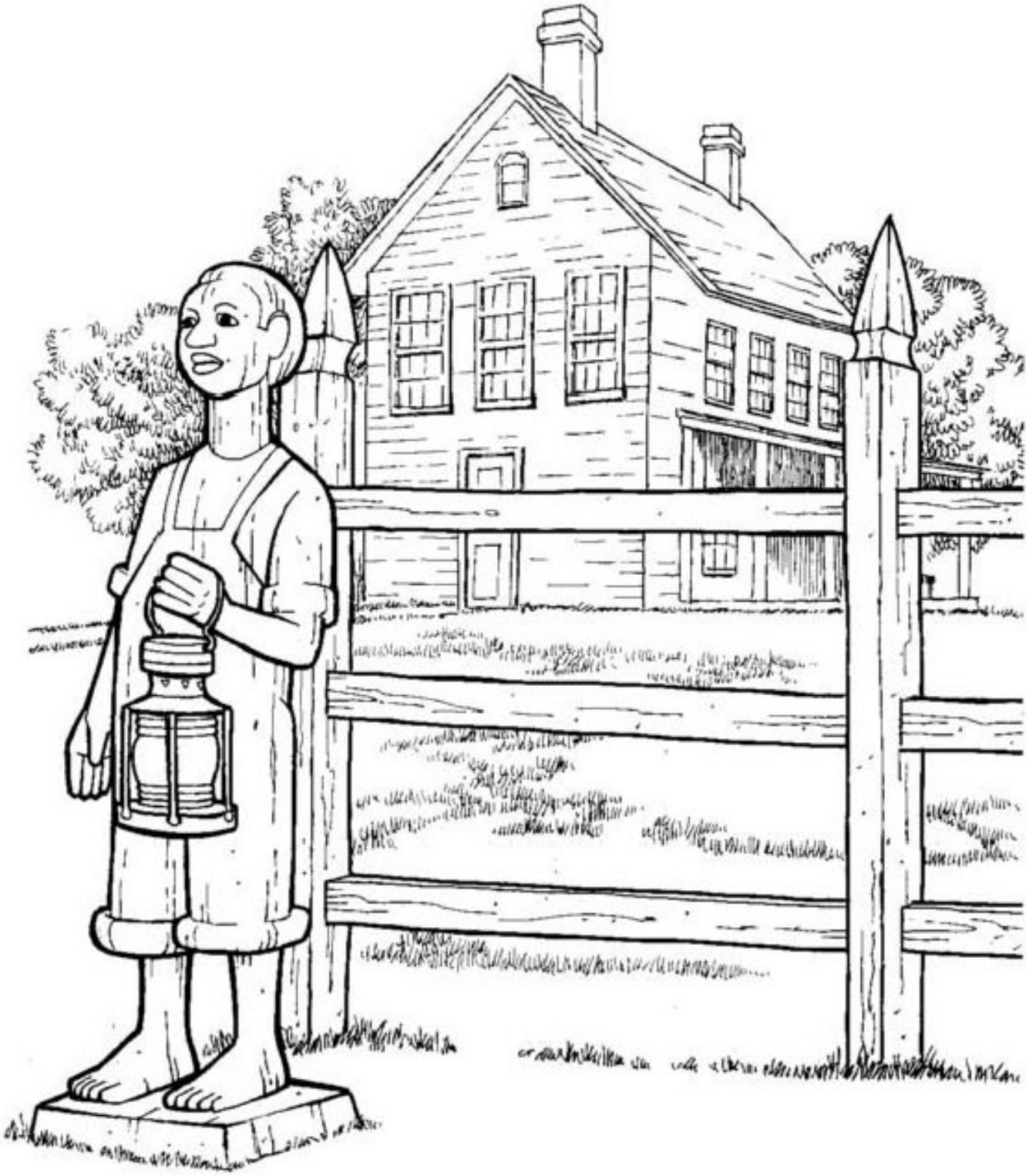
Refugees arriving at a safe house. Shown are a wagonload of refugees arriving at a house that had become a station on the Underground Railroad. Escapees arrived at safe houses individually or in groups, generally ill clothed and ill equipped, but some, like those pictured here, managed to find warm clothing for traveling in winter.



A group of refugees on the last leg of their journey. The various routes taken by runaways headed for Canada converged at a few central stations in the North, where large numbers of people gathered awaiting the last leg of their journey. Here we see a group that soon would split up, its members lodging with abolitionist families nearby until they could, individually or in small groups, make their way across the border with their guides.



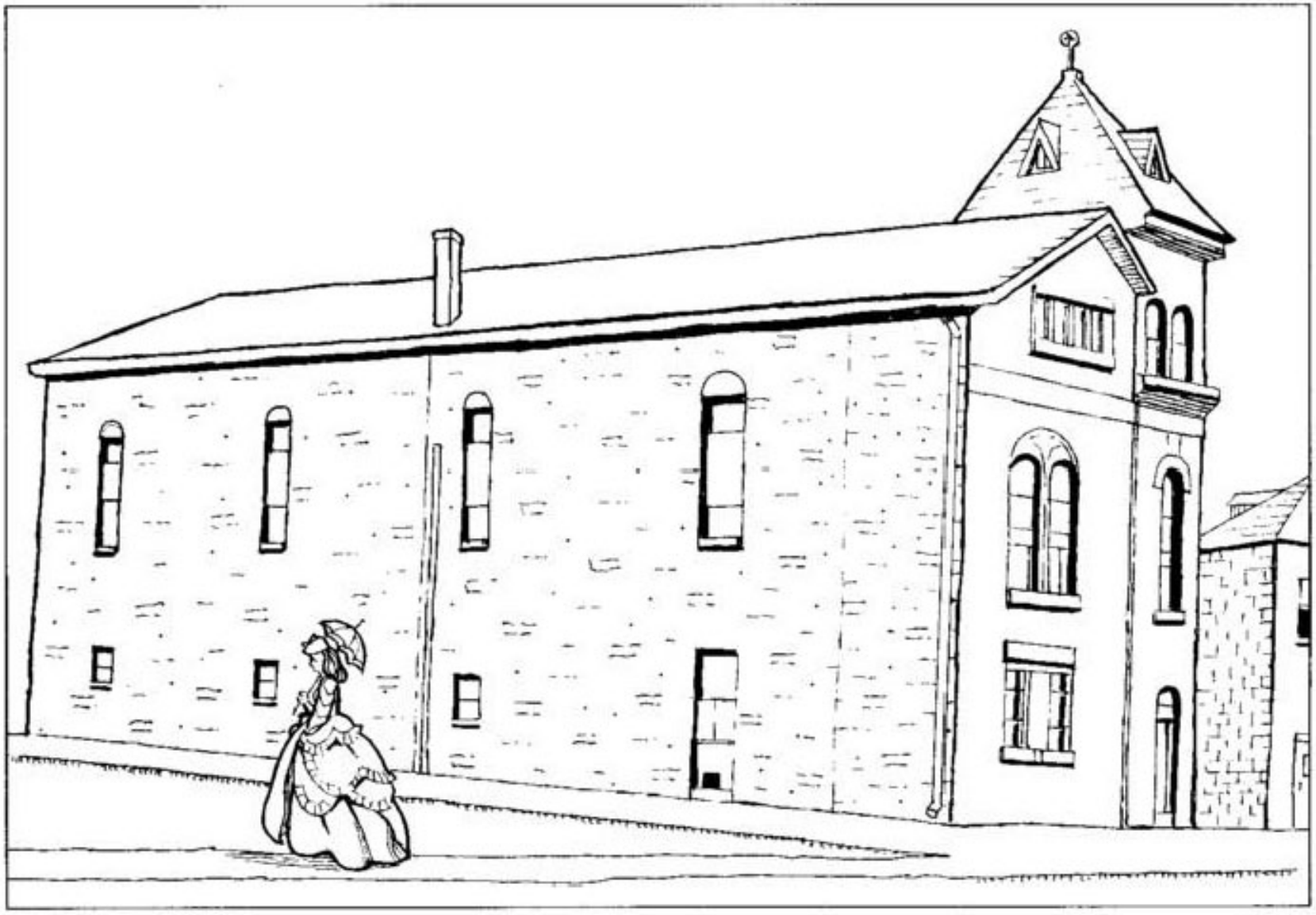
Laura Haviland. Laura Haviland was a stationmaster as well as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, sheltering fugitive slaves and guiding them along the road to freedom. She also opened a school founded on two principles that were revolutionary for the times: the integration of black and white children, and the presence of both boys and girls in the same classroom. Haviland is pictured here with one type of the notorious slave collars, as well as various manacles used to restrain and punish slaves.



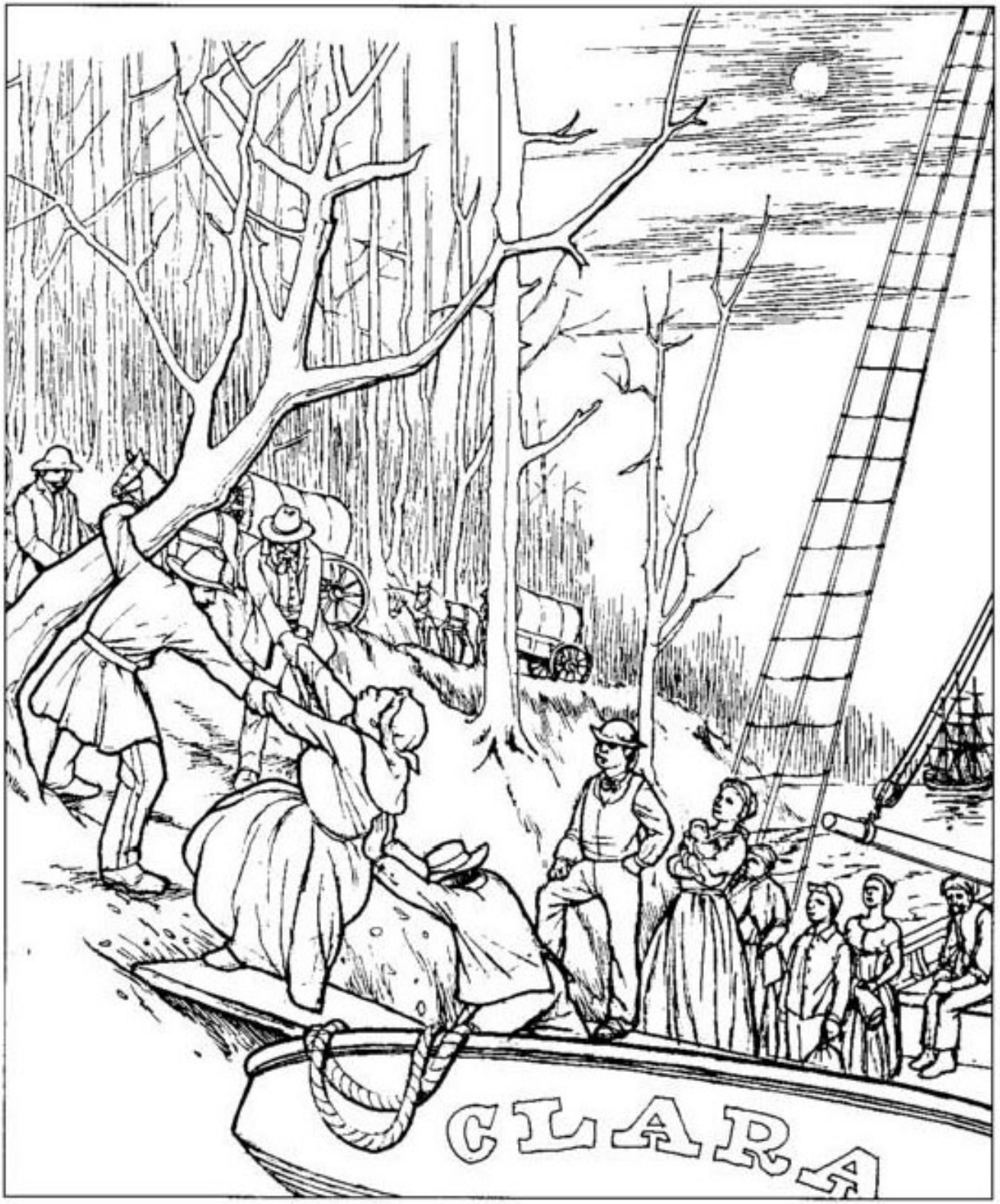
The "faithful groom," a signal station on the Underground Railroad. The lighting of the lantern signaled that here was a "safe house" for sheltering runaway slaves. Another signal might be a blanket, cloth, or flag hanging in a certain place; in addition, code words were used, as well as special knocks at the safe-house door.

The Christiana Riot. In 1850 a prominent Maryland farmer, Edward Gorsuch, discovered that several of his runaway slaves were in Christiana, Pennsylvania, being sheltered in the home of William Parker, himself a fugitive slave and a conductor of the Underground Railroad. Gorsuch traveled to Pennsylvania with the intention of "recovering his property or breakfasting in hell." On September 11, threats were exchanged outside the Parker home; shots were fired; and in the exchange of bullets Gorsuch was killed and his son wounded. Thaddeus Stevens defended Parker and thirty others who were tried for treason; he won a decision of "not guilty" after fifteen minutes of jury consultation. Parker later escaped a manhunt and, with the assistance of Frederick Douglass, escaped to Canada.

Levi Coffin House, the Indiana station on the Underground Railroad. The Levi Coffin home, in Newport (Fountain City), Indiana, was known as the "Grand Central Station" of the Underground Railroad. An estimated 2,000 fugitive slaves were assisted in their flight by the blacksmith Levi Coffin and his wife, Catharine. Here we see in front of the Coffin home a family newly escaped from bondage. The Coffins, believers in the free-labor goods movement, operated a store whose products were made without slave labor. The Coffin house had a connection with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as well: the slave upon whom the character "Eliza" was based was one of thousands who passed through the Coffin house on the way to freedom. Eliza Harris actually did flee from slave catchers over spring ice in the Ohio River.



Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Reading, Pennsylvania. Built in 1837, Bethel was active in the Underground Railroad during the years preceding the Civil War. Many church members harbored fugitive slaves escaping northward. One of the founding members of the church, Jacob Ross, was a runaway slave from Virginia.

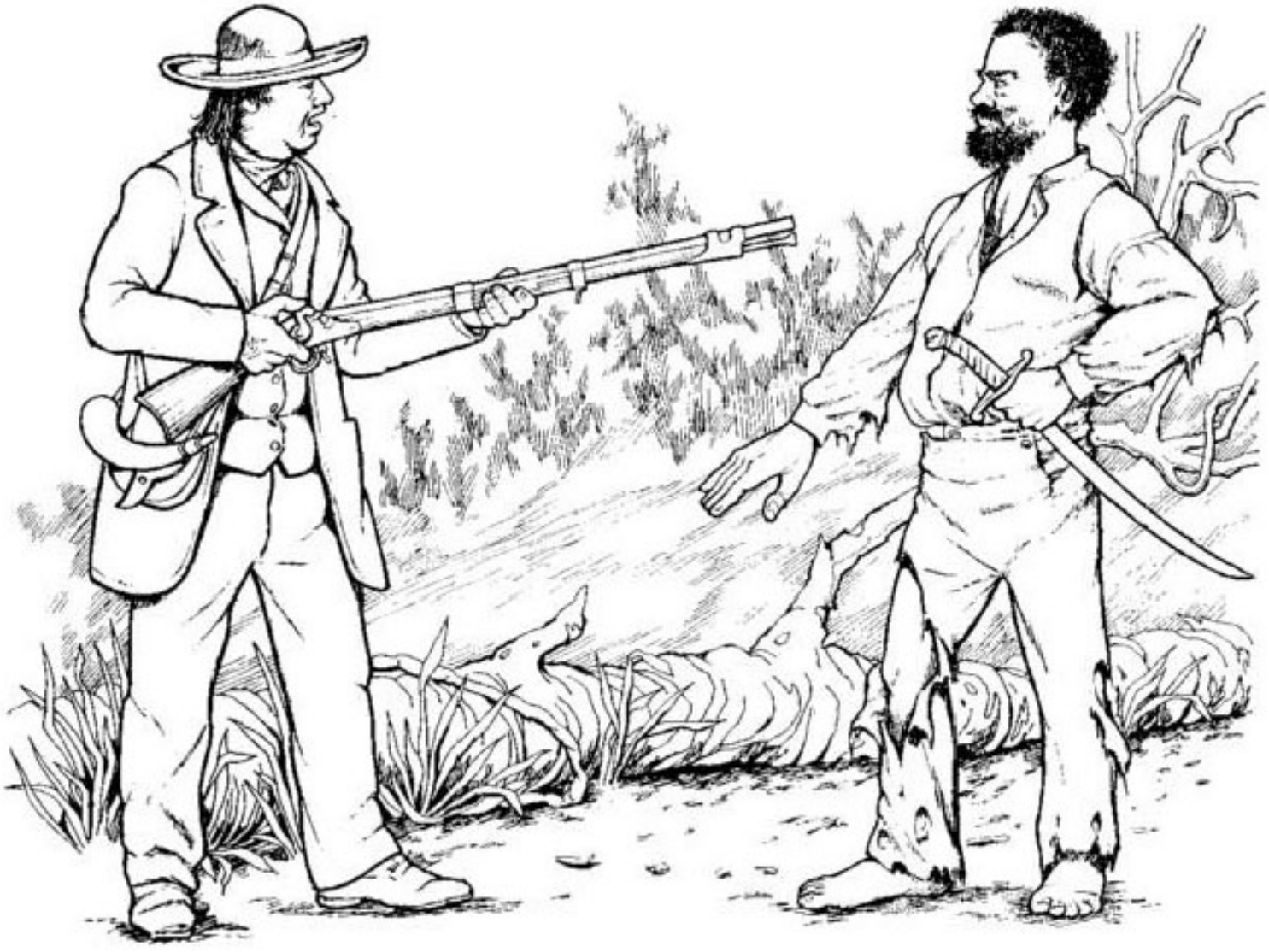


Refugees disembarking from a riverboat. When a ship arrived at League Island, Philadelphia, the conductors of the Underground Railroad waited with wagons and carriages to whisk the passengers away. After the passage of the second Fugitive Slave Act, such large movements of refugees were more dangerous and had to be managed on an individual basis.

Ellen Craft, who, with her husband, assisted runaways in Georgia. William and Ellen Craft were slaves who used a novel method to escape from Georgia. Ellen, whose light skin enabled her to pass for white, disguised herself as a gentleman traveling with her manservant (William Craft in disguise). After many adventures, the Crafts managed to reach freedom and were celebrated as heroes of the anti-slavery movement.

Twelfth Baptist Church in Boston. The twelfth Baptist Church became known as the "church of the fugitive slaves" because of the number of refugees sheltered there during the years of the Underground Railroad.

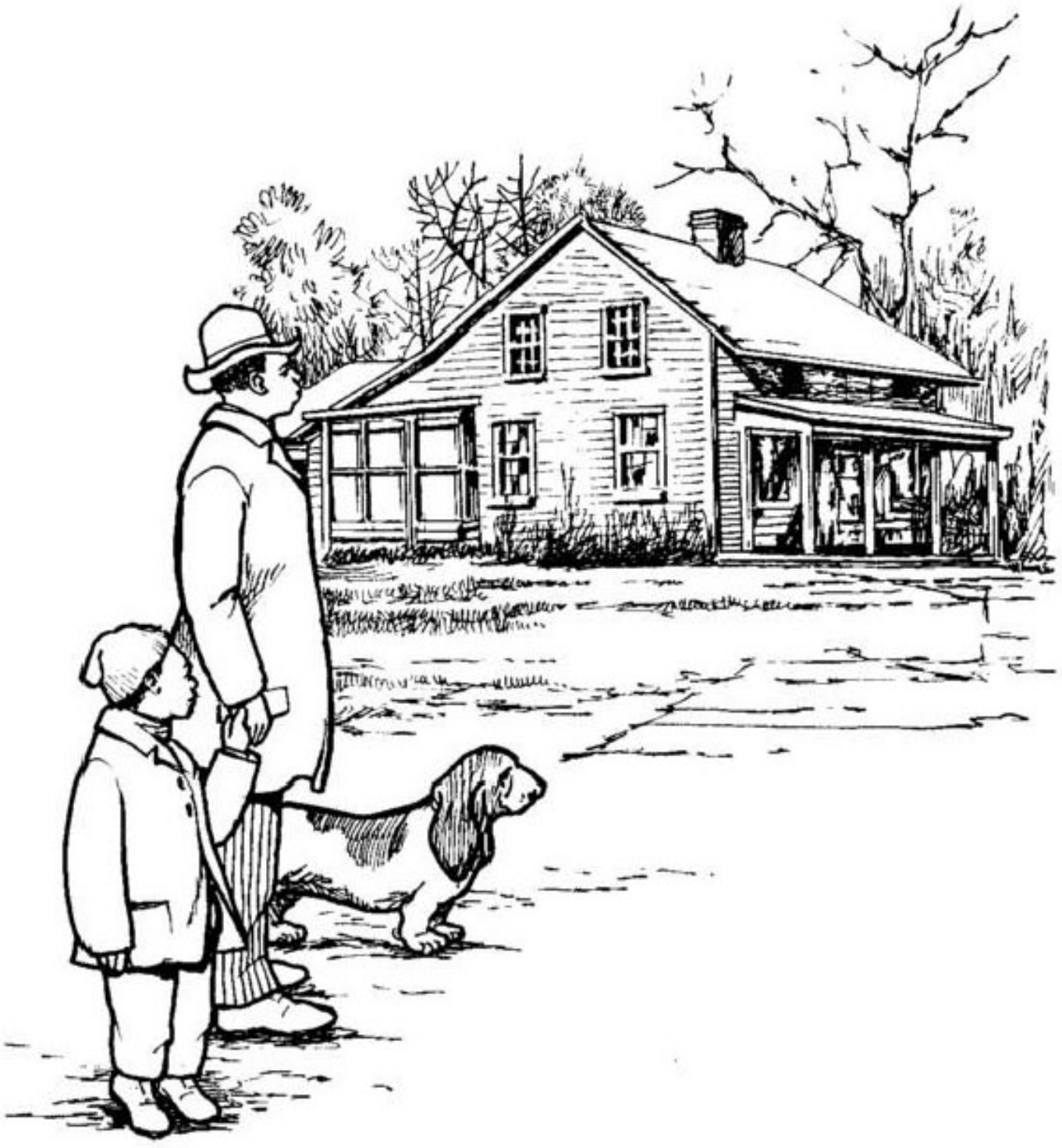
Henry "Box" Brown. Henry Brown, a Virginia slave, decided that because he was considered a "white man's property" he would, in his escape attempt, travel as a piece of property. He persuaded a carpenter to build him a box lined with fabric, just long enough for Brown to sit in. Then, with a small supply of biscuits, water, and a small hand drill, he got into the box and had himself sealed and shipped to Philadelphia. It was a long, uncomfortable trip, but the crate was eventually delivered to the Anti Slave Society 26 hours later. When the lid was pried off the box, Henry Brown stiffly rose to his feet, saying, "How do you do, gentlemen?" From that day on he was known as Henry "Box" Brown, a hero to the anti-slavery cause.



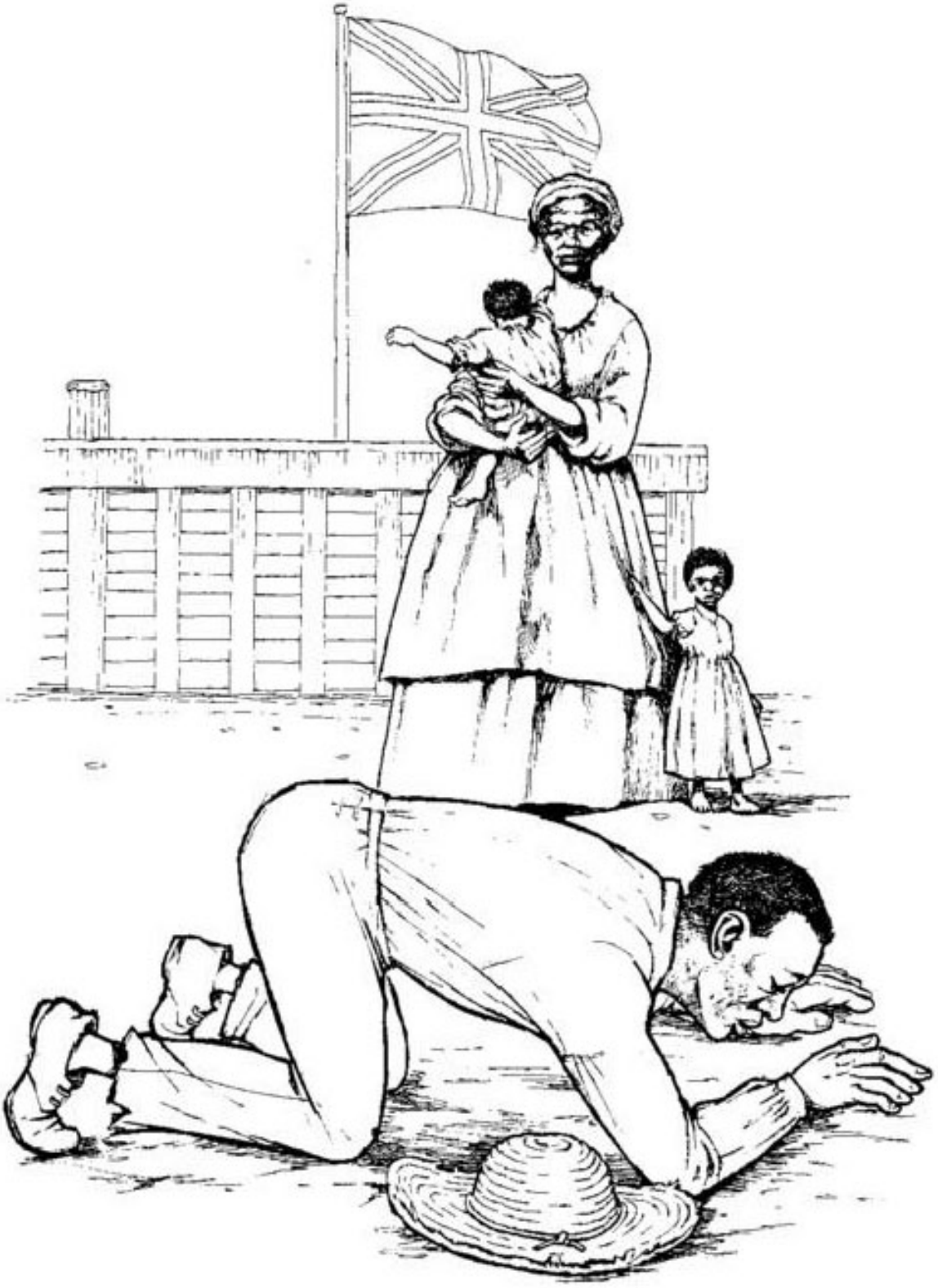
The capture of Nat Turner. In 1831, Nat Turner, a slave in Southampton County, Virginia, led a band of escaped slaves in an attack on neighboring plantations. Fifty-seven white men, women, and children were killed during the brutal uprising. A sensational manhunt followed, during which about 100 blacks were killed by angry mobs of whites. Turner, as well as twenty companions, was captured, tried, and executed.

John Brown on the way to his execution. Upon the failure of his attempt in 1859 to raise a slave revolt at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, abolitionist John Brown was sentenced to be hanged for treason, conspiracy, and murder. On the way to his execution, under heavy guard, Brown stopped to kiss a black baby (pictured here). To the opponents of slavery he was a martyr and hero who gave his life for the cause of freedom.

Refugees arriving at Fort Monroe during the Civil War. During the Civil War, General Benjamin Butler, the commanding officer of Fort Monroe early in the war and an ardent abolitionist, declared runaway slaves arriving at the fort to be "contraband of war"—legitimate spoils of war—and thus no longer slaves. This decision liberated thousands of slaves behind Union lines and caused many others to flee to the "freedom fort," where they were fed and clothed and put to work for the Union cause.

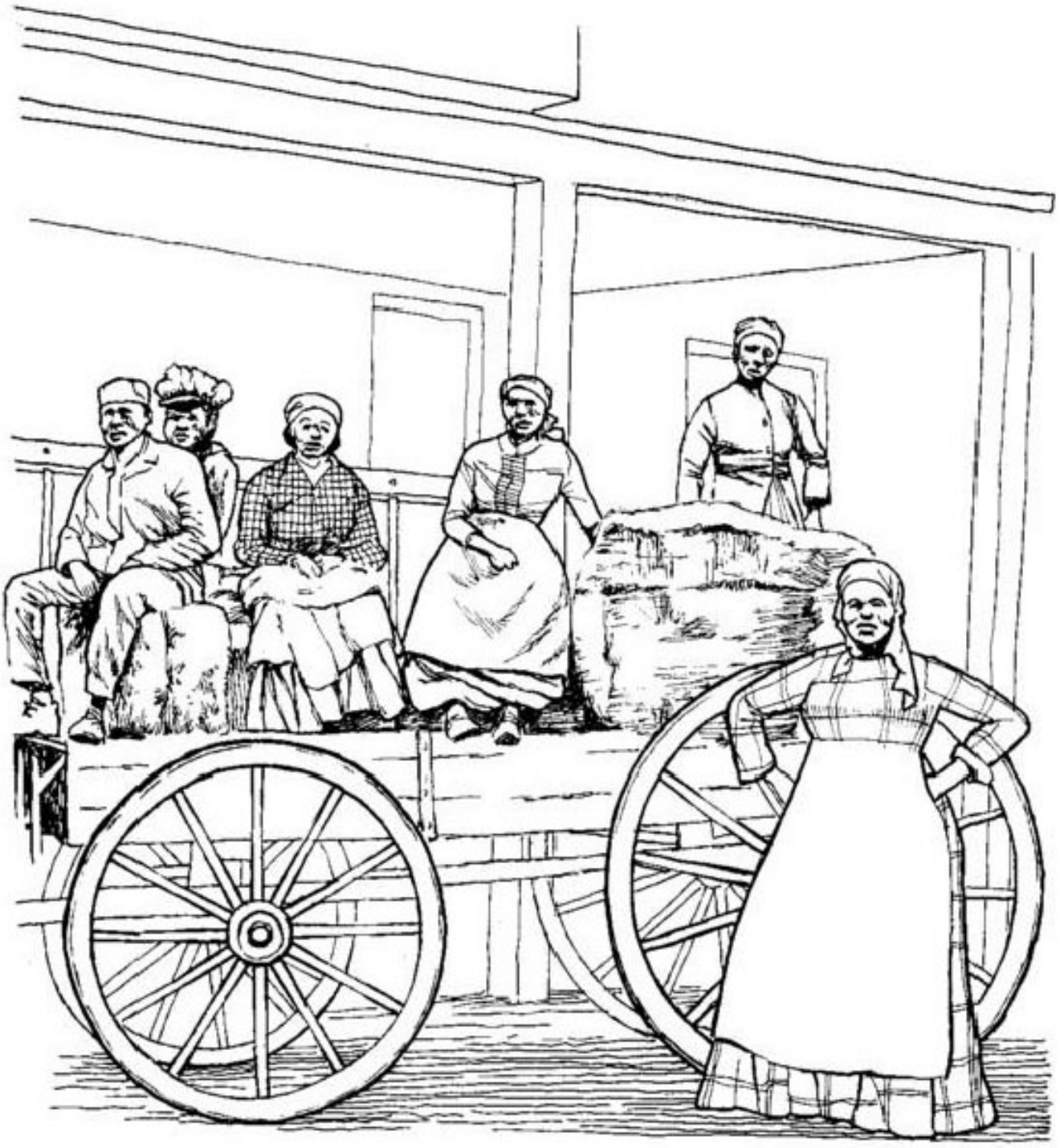


The John Todd house, Tabor, Iowa. John Todd was a moving spirit in the Iowa division of the Underground Railroad; his home, pictured here, became a prominent "station." Fugitive slaves were hidden in a small room under the eaves and in the barn. John Brown used the Todd house as his headquarters in his battle against slavery in the years 1854 to 1856.

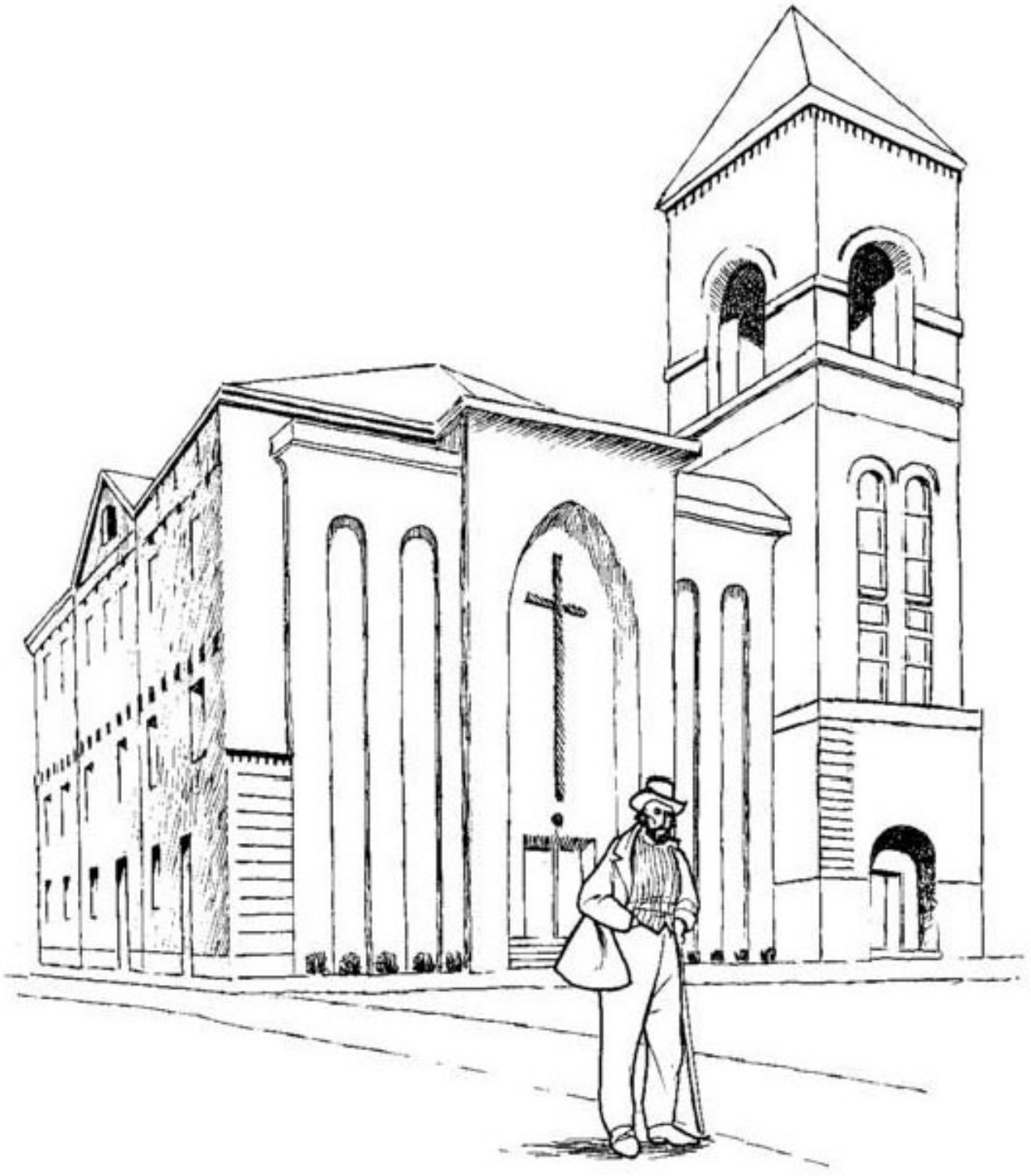


The arrival of the Josiah Henson family in Canada. Josiah Henson, whose life inspired, in part, the character of Uncle Tom in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, exclaimed as he kneeled on Canadian soil, "When my feet first touched the Canada shore I threw myself on the ground, rolled in the sand, seized handfuls of it and kissed them and danced around, till in the eyes of several who were present, I passed for a madman."

A refugee family's home in Canada. Fugitive slaves soon found work in various Canadian towns—unskilled ex-field hands found plenty of work on farms, in lumber mills, and at building sites for new houses; they also took on odd jobs such as painting houses and sawing wood for fuel. The town of Chatham had an all-black fire brigade in 1855. Here we see the cabin home of a black family in Essex County.

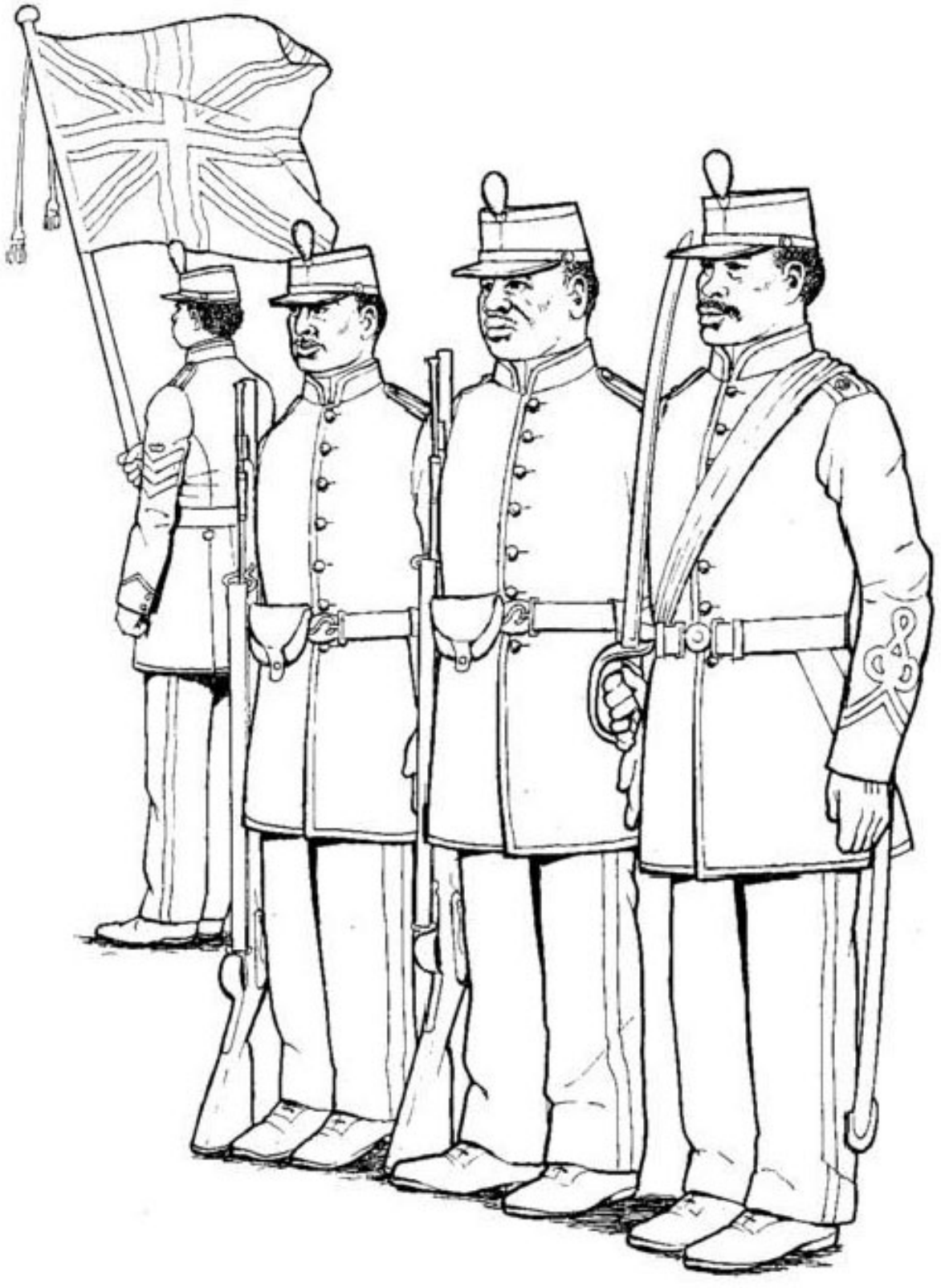


A portrait of ex-slaves who escaped to Canada. Shown are a family of ex-slaves who escaped to Canada in the 1850s. They discovered that, with freedom, they also enjoyed the same legal rights as Canadians. Henry Williamson, a former slave, declared, "I feel as if a weight were off me. Nothing would induce me to go back. . . .I would rather be wholly poor, and be free, than to have all I could wish and be a slave."



Bethel AME Church, Indianapolis, Indiana. The Bethel AME Church in Indianapolis has played an important role in the city's black community for over 160 years. The congregation became involved in the anti-slavery movement in 1848, harboring fugitive slaves en route to Canada. Bethel AME Church is known as the "mother church" of the African Methodist Episcopal faith in Indiana.

Delos Rogest Davis, lawyer and King's Counsel. Delos Rogest Davis, born a slave in the state of Maryland, was taken to Canada when he was four. After working as a sailor and a mill worker, Davis went on to become a teacher; after that, he studied the law. In 1884 he became Canada's first black lawyer through the passage of a special act. Davis was named King's Counsel, a high honor, in 1910. He was the first black to attain that position in the British Empire.



Black soldiers under the Union Jack in 1860. Black soldiers formed the African Rifles, part of the first military unit raised in British Columbia, the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps. The African Rifles were not paid; they built their own military drill hall and ordered their own uniforms. Their unit was created to help defend Canada against the U.S.

Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman once said, "I think slavery is the next thing to hell." She herself was a slave who worked hard from the age of six until she was about 28, when she heard that she was to be sold and separated from her family. Tubman ran away, and with the help of willing hands along the Underground Railroad, she traveled north to Philadelphia. In 1850, after the passage of the second Fugitive Slave Act, Tubman moved to Canada, but she continued to assist fugitive slaves. Rewards of up to $12,000 were posted in the U.S. for her capture, and Tubman always traveled armed. But she never was captured, and she never lost a "railroad" passenger. Tubman led so many people to freedom along the Underground Railroad that she was compared to the prophet Moses, who led the Jews out of slavery to the Promised Land.